

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 01840

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK
SUBJECT: "PENCOURT FILE" HITS PRESS, HAS LITTLE IMPACT

REF: 77 LONDON 20527

SUMMARY - THE SUNDAY OBSERVER, AFTER A REPORTED 50,000 POUND ADVANCE TO AUTHORS BARRIE PENROSE AND ROGER COURTIOR (PENCOURT), DECIDED NOT TO PUBLISH EXTRACTS FROM THE FORTHCOMING BOOK, "PENCOURT FILE". THIS BOOK PURPORTS TO DESCRIBE THE PRIVATE PECCADILLOS AND FEARS OF LEADING BRITISH POLITICIANS, INCLUDING FORMER PRIME MINISTER WILSON AND JEREMY THORPE, AND ESTABLISHMENT EFFORTS TO COVER UP. THE TABLOID MIRROR -- BRITAIN'S LARGEST SELLING NEWSPAPER -- STEPPED INTO THE BREECH AND HAS BEEN PUBLISHING PORTIONS OF THE AUTHORS' WORK SINCE JANUARY 30. THE MIRROR'S HANDLING OF THE MATERIAL SUGGESTS THAT THE AUTHORS HAVE BASED THEIR CONCLUSIONS MORE ON HEARSAY THAN ON HARD EVIDENCE, BUT THE EXPOSE MAY BE TITILLATING MILLIONS. MOST SIGNIFICANTLY, THESE REVELATIONS HAVE CAUSED FEW RIPPLES ELSEWHERE IN THE BRITISH MEDIA. END SUMMARY.

L. THE HIGHLY TOUTED AND SENSATIONAL STORY EXPOSING PERSONAL PECCADILLOS, POLITICAL INTRIGUE AND ESTABLISHMENT COVER-UP WRITTEN BY FORMER BBC JOURNALISTS BARRIE
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PENROSE AND ROGER COURTIOR NEARLY FAILED TO FIND SPACE IN THE BRITISH PRESS. THE AILING SUNDAY OBSERVER, WHICH REPORTEDLY PAID 50,000 POUNDS FOR EXCLUSIVE RIGHTS TO THEIR BOOK, "PENCOURT FILE", DECIDED TO DROP THE PROJECT AT THE LAST MOMENT. EDITOR DONALD TRELFORD REPORTEDLY TOOK THIS DECISION AFTER SEEING THE FINAL INSTALLMENT OF THEIR WORK AND CONCLUDING THAT THEY HAD FAILED TO

PROVE THEIR CASE.

2. THE OBSERVER'S DECISION LEFT THE WAY OPEN FOR OTHER PAPERS TO BID FOR THE WORK. AND THE TABLOID MIRROR SNAPPED IT UP. BUT THE MIRROR'S EDITORIAL STYLE -- WHICH STRESSES BREVITY AND SENSATIONALISM -- MAY WEAKEN THE IMPACT OF THE INFORMATION DEVELOPED BY THE AUTHORS. IN THE ARTICLES APPEARING OVER THE PAST FOUR DAYS THERE IS LITTLE TO SUGGEST THAT THE AUTHORS' INVESTIGATIONS PRODUCED HARD FACTS TO SUBSTANTIATE THE HEARSAY EVIDENCE, MUCH OF WHICH SEEM TO COME FROM FORMER PRIME MINISTER WILSON AND HIS PRIVATE SECRETARY, LADY FALKENDER.

3. THE "MAJOR STORIES" THAT HAVE APPEARED SO FAR INCLUDE:

- ALLEGATIONS THAT A GROUP OF SENIOR BRITISH MILITARY OFFICERS WERE INVOLVED IN A 1968 PLOT TO OVERTHROW THE LABOR GOVERNMENT;

- APPARENT WILSON FEARS THAT HE UNWITTINGLY AGREED TO THE APPOINTMENT OF A SENIOR CIVIL SERVANT, WHO WAS A COMMUNIST "MOLE", TO A DOWNING STREET POST;

- WILSON'S STATED BELIEF THAT THE BRITISH SECURITY SERVICES ARE STRONGLY BIASED IN FAVOR OF THE FAR RIGHT AND ARE DISLOYAL (THE CIA FIGURES IN THIS EPISODE -- SEE BELOW);

- ASSERTIONS THAT FORMER LIBERAL LEADER JEREMY CONFIDENTIAL

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THORPE HAD AN ILLICIT HOMOSEXUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH MALE MODEL NORMAN SCOTT;

- ALLEGATIONS THAT THORPE'S FRIENDS AND OTHERS ENGAGED IN AN EFFORT TO COVER UP THIS POTENTIAL SCANDAL AND THAT THESE EFFORTS INCLUDED AN ABORTIVE ATTEMPT TO MURDER SCOTT (THIS LATTER CHARGE IS REPORTEDLY UNDER POLICE INVESTIGATION);

- SUGGESTIONS THAT THE BRITISH "ESTABLISHMENT" SOUGHT TO BLOCK THE INTREPID REPORTERS IN THEIR PURSUIT OF THE TRUTH AND TO CENSOR THEIR FINDINGS; AND

- AN ALLEGATION THAT WILSON'S 1976 RESIGNATION WAS TIMED TO COINCIDE WITH THE RELEASE OF NEWS THAT PRINCESS MARGARET'S MARRIAGE HAD BROKEN DOWN (CURIOSLY, IT WAS THIS STORY THAT DREW THE GREATEST ATTENTION FROM OTHER MEDIA).

4. THE REPORT INVOLVING THE CIA, ALBEIT SOMEWHAT TANGENTIALLY, CENTERS ON WILSON'S DISTRUST OF THE BRITISH SECURITY SERVICES. ACCORDING TO THE AUTHORS, WILSON SUSPECTED THAT MI5 AND MI6 WERE TRYING TO

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SMEAR THE LABOR PARTY BECAUSE ULTRA-RIGHT ELEMENTS IN THOSE SERVICES BELIEVED THE LABOR PARTY WAS VIRTUALLY A COMMUNIST ORGANIZATION. IN MID-1975 WILSON REPORTEDLY SUMMONED "SIR MAURICE OLDFIELD, THE MI6 HEAD" TO DISCUSS RUMORS OF COMMUNIST PENETRATION OF NUMBER 10 DOWNING STREET, AND OLDFIELD PLACED THE BLAME ON "A SECTION OF MI5 WHICH IS UNRELIABLE". WILSON THEN CALLED IN SIR MICHAEL HANLEY, REPORTED HEAD OF MI5, WHO "CONFIRMED THE EXISTENCE WITHIN HIS SERVICE OF A DISAFFECTED FACTION WITH EXTREME RIGHT-WING VIEWS". THE MIRROR THEN GOES ON TO ALLEGE THAT WILSON SOMEHOW BECAME SUSPICIOUS THAT THE "CIA WAS INVOLVED IN AN ATTEMPT TO INFILTRATE THE CABINET OFFICE" AND COMMUNICATED HIS FEARS TO SENATOR HUBERT HUMPHREY. AS A RESULT, THE THEN DIRECTOR OF THE CIA, GEORGE BUSH, "SPECIALLY VISITED WILSON AND OFFERED ALL HELP IN THE FUTURE". NEITHER THE NATURE OF THIS "HELP" NOR ITS PURPOSE WERE SPECIFIED IN THE MIRROR PIECE.

5. COMMENT: FROM WHAT THE MIRROR HAS PUBLISHED THUS FAR, THE "PENCOURT FILE" APPEARS TO RELY ON HEARSAY AND INNUENDO, WITH WILSON AND FALKENDER AS THE PRINCIPAL SOURCES. INDEED, IT WOULD NOT BE SURPRISING TO US IF MANY MIRROR READERS BEGAN TO SUSPECT THAT THE FORMER
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PRIME MINISTER SUFFERED FROM A FAIRLY ADVANCED CASE OF PARANOIA. FROM OUR VANTAGE POINT -- AND WE RECOGNIZE THAT THE MIRROR'S EDITORIAL STYLE MAY BE A DISTORTING FACTOR -- IT APPEARS THAT THE PENCOURT DISCLOSURES HAVE FAILED TO FULFILL WHAT THE AUTHORS HAD PROMISED, AND THAT OBSERVER EDITOR TRELFOED EXERCISED GOOD JUDGMENT IN DECLINING TO PUBLISH AND WRITING OFF THE 50,000 POUND ADVANCE. THE IMPACT OF THE MIRROR REPORTS HAS SO FAR BEEN MINIMAL, BUT THE TIMES AND GUARDIAN FEBRUARY 2 PUBLISHED A SHORT REPORT QUOTING WILSON AS DENYING MOST OF THE REPORTS ATTRIBUTED TO HIM OR LADY FALKENDER.

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